DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 402 794 FL 024 439

AUTHOR Marcos, Kathleen
TITLE Why, How, and When Should My Child Learn a Second Language?
INSTITUTION ACCESS ERIC, Rockville, MD.; ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, Washington, D.C.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO NLE-97-2529
PUB DATE 97
CONTRACT RK9518801
NOTE 7p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; *Age Differences; Educational Benefits; Elementary Education; *Elementary School Students; *FLES; Immersion Programs; *Language Role; Language Usage; Parent Influence; Second Language Instruction; *Second Language Learning; *Second Languages

ABSTRACT

The brochure, intended for the parents of children in elementary school or younger, answers common questiohs about second language learning and instruction for children. In question-and-answer form, the following issues are addressed: the benefits of knowing a second language; why it is better for a child to learn a second language in elementary school than after the onset of adolescence; the programs through which second languages are taught to children (immersion programs, Foreign Language in Elementary School (FLES) taught as a core subject, and Foreign Language Exploration (FLEX) programs that present one or more languages with less emphasis on proficiency); whether learning a second language will interfere with the child's first-language development; how parents of children in such programs can help children learn and practice; and how to help establish a program if one is not currently available. Contains 16 references. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 402 794

Why, How and When Should My Child Learn a Second Language?

by Kathleen Marcos

FL024439

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

FL

Why, How, and When Should My Child Learn a Second Language?

FL034436

Most experts agree that the earlier a child is introduced to a second language, the greater the chances are that the child will become truly proficient in the language. A February 1996 *Newsweek* article made the claim that "A child taught a second language after the age of 10 or so is unlikely ever to speak it like a native." This statement is supported by linguists and has been proven in extensive research studies.

In addition to developing a lifelong ability to communicate with more people, children may derive other benefits from early language instruction, including improved overall school performance and superior problem-solving skills. Knowing a second language ultimately provides a competitive advantage in the work force by opening up additional job opportunities.

What Are the Benefits of Knowing a Second Language?

Students of foreign languages score statistically higher on standardized tests conducted in English. In its 1992 report, *College Bound Seniors: The 1992 Profile of SAT and Achievement Test Takers*, the College Entrance Examination Board reported that students who averaged 4 or more years of foreign language study scored higher on the verbal section of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) than those who had studied 4 or more years in any other subject area. In addition, the average mathematics score for individuals who had taken 4 or more years of foreign language study was identical to the score of those who had studied the same number of years of mathematics. These findings are consistent with College Board profiles for previous years.

Students of foreign languages have access to a greater number of career possibilities and develop a deeper understanding of their own and other

cultures. Some evidence also suggests that children who receive second language instruction are more creative and better at solving complex problems. The benefits to society are many. Americans fluent in other languages enhance our economic competitiveness abroad, improve global communication, and maintain our political and security interests.

Why Is It Better for My Child To Learn a Language in Elementary School?

Studies have shown—and experience has supported—that children who learn a language before the onset of adolescence are much more likely to have native-like pronunciation. A number of experts attribute this proficiency to physiological changes that occur in the maturing brain as a child enters puberty. Of course, as with any subject, the more years a child can devote to learning a language, the more competent he or she will become. Regardless, introducing children to alternative ways of expressing themselves and to different cultures generally broadens their outlook and gives them the opportunity to communicate with many more people.

How Are Languages Taught to Children?

The three major types of programs available in elementary schools are language immersion programs, foreign language in elementary schools (FLES) programs, and foreign language exploratory (FLEX) programs.

- **Immersion programs** allow children to spend part or all of the school day learning in a second language. In full (total) immersion programs, which are available in a limited number of schools, children learn all of their subjects (math, social studies, science, etc.) in the second language. Partial immersion programs operate on the same principle, but only a portion of the curriculum is presented in the second language. Under this type of program, a child may learn social studies and science in Spanish or French in the morning and learn mathematics and language arts in English in the afternoon. In both cases, the second language is the *medium* for content instruction rather than the *subject* of instruction. Children enrolled in immersion programs work toward full proficiency in the second language and usually reach a higher level of competence than those participating in other language programs.
- **FLES programs** are more common than immersion programs. A second language is presented as a distinct subject, much as science or social studies. Typically, the course is taught three to five times per week. Depending on the frequency of the classes and the opportunity for practice, children in these sequential programs may attain substantial proficiency in the language studied.
- **FLEX programs** introduce students to other cultures and to language as a general concept. Time is spent exploring one or more languages or presenting information about language itself. Although this information may be introduced, the emphasis is not on attaining proficiency. While some proficiency may be attained with a once- or twice-per-week program emphasizing the use of a specific language, parents should not expect children to attain fluency in such programs. These programs, however, can provide a basis for later learning.

Will a Second Language Interfere With My Child's English Ability?

In most cases, learning another language enhances a child's English ability. Children can learn much about English by learning the structure of other languages. Common vocabulary also helps children learn the meaning of new words in English. Experimental studies have shown that no long-term delay in native English language development occurs between children participating in second language immersion classes and those schooled exclusively in English.

In fact, children enrolled in foreign language programs score statistically higher on standardized tests conducted in English. A number of reports have demonstrated that children who have learned a second language earn higher SAT scores, particularly on the verbal section of the test. One study showed that by the fifth year of an immersion program, students outperform all comparison groups and remain high academic achievers throughout their schooling.

If My Child Is Enrolled in a Language Program in Her School, What Can I Do To Help Her Learn and Practice?

Most importantly, encourage your child's interest in the language and in other cultures. Show her that you value the ability to speak a second language. Attend cultural events that feature music, dance, or food from the country or countries where the language is spoken. If possible, provide some books, videos, or other materials in the second language. If you are familiar with the language yourself, read to her. Summer programs offering international exchange are suitable for older children and offer valuable opportunities to speak the second language and explore a different culture firsthand. Children normally live with a host family, which provides them with a safe and sheltered environment where they can practice their language skills.

If My Child's School Does Not Offer Language Study, What Can I Do To Help Establish a Program?

Speak to the school principal about your interest in seeing a program established. Determine what type of program best fits your needs. Join with other parents interested in starting up a program. Discuss the possibility at a PTA meeting. Write to the teachers, the school board, and the school district headquarters. Many resources are available to help parents and teachers establish a second language program. For general information on early language programs, contact the following organizations:

Advocates for Language Learning
P.O. Box 4962
Culver City, CA 90231
Phone: 310–313–3333

ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics
1118 22d Street NW
Washington, DC 20037
Toll Free: 800–276–9834
E-mail: eric@cal.org
Web: http://www.cal.org/ericcll

The National FLES* Institute
The University of Maryland at Baltimore
Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics
Baltimore, MD 21228
Phone: 301–231–0824

National Network for Early Language Learning
Center for Applied Linguistics
1118 22d Street NW
Washington, DC 20037
Phone: 202–429–9292
Web: http://www.cal.org

Sources

References identified with ED or EJ are abstracted in the ERIC database. References with EJ are journal articles available at most research libraries. Those with ED are available in microfiche collections at more than 900 locations or can be obtained in paper copy from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service at 1–800–443–ERIC. Call 1–800–LET–ERIC for more details.

Abuhamdia, Z. A. 1987. "Neurobiological Foundations for Foreign Language Accents." *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching* 25 (3): 203–13. EJ 361 139.

Arbeiter, S. 1984. *Profiles, College-Bound Seniors, 1984*. New York: College Entrance Examination Board. ED 253 157.

Bamford, K. W., and D. T. Mizokawa. 1991. "Additive-Bilingual (Immersion) Education: Cognitive and Language Development." *Language Learning* 41 (3): 413–29. EJ 432 977.

Begley, S. February 19, 1996. "Your Child's Brain." *Newsweek* 127 (8): 55–62.

College Entrance Examination Board. 1992. *College-Bound Seniors. 1992 Profile of SAT and Achievement Test Takers. National Report*. New York: College Entrance Examination Board. ED 351 352.

College Entrance Examination Board. 1982. *Profiles, College-Bound Seniors, 1981*. New York: College Entrance Examination Board. ED 223 708.

Cooper, T. C. 1987. "Foreign Language Study and SAT-Verbal Scores." *Modern Language Journal* 71 (4): 381–87. EJ 363 615.

Curtain, H., and C. A. Pesola. 1994. *Languages and Children: Making the Match*, 2d edition. White Plains, NY: Longman. ED 376 717.

Curtiss, S. (Speaker). 1995. *Gray Matters: The Developing Brain*. (Final Script of Radio Broadcast) Madison, WI: Wisconsin Public Radio Association.

Genesee, F. 1987. *Learning Through Two Languages*. Cambridge, MA: Newbury House.

Lipton, G. 1995. *Focus on FLES*: Planning and Implementing FLES* Programs (Foreign Language in Elementary Schools)*. Baltimore, MD: National FLES* Institute.

Met, M. 1993. *Foreign Language Immersion Programs. ERIC Digest*. Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics. ED 363 141.

Patkowski, M. S. 1990. "Age and Accent in a Second Language: A Reply to James Emil Flege." *Applied Linguistics* 11 (1): 73–90. EJ 405 461.

Rosenbusch, M. H. 1995. *Guidelines for Starting an Elementary School Foreign Language Program*. ERIC Digest. Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics. ED 383 227.

Thomas, W. P., V. P. Collier, and M. Abbott. 1993. "Academic Achievement Through Japanese, Spanish, or French: The First Two Years of Partial Immersion." *Modern Language Journal* 77 (2): 170–180. EJ 465 537.

Villano, D. April 1996. "Heads Up: Time To Go Bilingual?" *Smartkid* 1 (4): 45–49.

☆ ☆ ☆

This brochure was written by Kathleen Marcos of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics.

This publication was prepared by ACCESS ERIC with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under Contract No. RK95188001. The opinions expressed in this brochure do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. This brochure is in the public domain. Authorization to reproduce it in whole or in part is granted.

☆ ☆ ☆

ERIC®

NLE 97–2529